

University of Newcastle

**Journal #1: Engaging with Mystery – “A Thing is Never Just a Thing!”**

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I realize now that understanding my heart involves much more than seeing it as a hollow muscular organ that by its rhythmic contraction acts as a pump maintaining the circulation of my blood.<sup>1</sup>

On the contrary, my heart is the core of myself as a human person – the centre of my thinking, feeling, and deciding.<sup>2</sup> It is the locus of my consciousness – the place where I ponder the mystery of myself, human existence, and God.<sup>3</sup> It is where my experiences are treasured.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the language of my heart presents a non-conceptual way of knowing, separate from cognition.<sup>5</sup> Finally, my heart is also a *sacred space* where I can get in touch with the truth of my being.<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding what I have attempted to describe above, the word *heart* points to mystery.<sup>7</sup> I may think that that I know its meaning, but at the same time its meaning remains obscure.<sup>8</sup> Fletcher notes that the word heart “voices the depth of existence; not just the depth of personal existence but the depth of the sea of existence.”<sup>9</sup> It is a primordial word such as holy, spirit, and sacred – there is a mystical or poetic dimension to the word<sup>10</sup> in that it points beyond itself to mystery.<sup>11</sup>

As I journey through life, at times I have experienced an emptiness that has arisen from a deep place within.<sup>12</sup> Then, from a depth beyond reason,<sup>13</sup> hope arises again within my soul. I believe that this hope surfaces from my heart because it is there, the Sacred Word reminds me, that “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, life without an awakened heart is empty.<sup>15</sup> And so, Fletcher concludes with

that which I concur experientially: “Faith is a matter of the heart before it is that of the ego or of the mind.”<sup>16</sup>

Further, if “*the love of God* has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5)<sup>17</sup> and “*God is love*” (1 Jn 4:8)<sup>18</sup>, then I have come to realize that God exists within my heart [emphasis mine]. Thus, it is the place where I can be open to God’s presence in my life.<sup>19</sup> Paul also testifies to this continuing presence of God within the depths of himself when he writes that “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).<sup>20</sup> There is a mystic exchange of hearts that occurs, which is tied in with an exchange of life.<sup>21</sup> As Fletcher notes, “Christ delights to live in our lives – and He wants us to delight to live in His.”<sup>22</sup> Through that exchange, I can embrace the anxieties and uncertainties of life.<sup>23</sup>

Through this presence of God – heart to heart – I am therefore given some awareness of what happened in Jesus during the various incidents in the Gospel accounts.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, I can recognize my life in his story as portrayed in the Gospels, as well as his story in my life.<sup>25</sup> Such a spirituality of the heart adds to the inner worth of my life and offers meaning in my failings and humiliations.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, I have learnt that I can dispose myself to open or awaken my heart.<sup>27</sup> Sitting quietly in a peaceful setting, for example, creates a contemplative space attractive to the heart – and from such awakening of the heart, mystical and poetic images can arise.<sup>28</sup>

Other ways by which I can awaken the heart include love in marriage, love of children, love of friendship, as well as compassionate care for those suffering.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, opening my heart, as Fletcher states, “is necessary for relating to the heart of Jesus: it is heart that speaks to heart”.<sup>30</sup>

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1981), 524. Annice Callahan, "Heart", in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 469. Callahan simply refers to the heart as "the blood-pumping organ of the body".
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> J. Lescrauwaet, "Christ's Wounded Heart: Symbol of God-With-Us", in *A New Heart for a New World: An Exploration of the Desires of God's Heart*, ed. B. Gallagher (Homebush: St. Pauls, 1986), 233.
- <sup>5</sup> Callahan, "Heart", 469.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Frank Fletcher, "Introducing Heart Spirituality", *Compass* 38:4 (Summer 2004): 21.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Callahan, "Heart", 469.
- <sup>12</sup> Fletcher, "Introducing Heart Spirituality", 22. This is not unlike what the Russian count Leo Tolstoy, author of *War and Peace*, experienced and described in his memoir, *My Confessions*.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 2172.
- <sup>15</sup> Fletcher, "Introducing Heart Spirituality", 22.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid. Augustine expressed the memorable words: "You made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee" (*Confessions*, ch. 1).
- <sup>17</sup> *The New King James Version: New Testament with Psalms* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), 304.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 465.
- <sup>19</sup> Callahan, "Heart", 469.
- <sup>20</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, 2259-2260.
- <sup>21</sup> Frank Fletcher, "Heart, Spirituality and the Lay Vocation", *Compass* 38:1 (Autumn 2004): 3-11.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Fletcher, "Introducing Heart Spirituality", 23.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid. *NIV Study Bible*, 1835. This point recently came home to me as I compared the inevitable trauma of my own first year of life (a time when my parents emigrated from Europe to Australia via boat passage), with how Mary and Joseph fled and escaped to Egypt after Christ was born. Matthew 2:13 states: "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'"
- <sup>26</sup> Fletcher, "Introducing Heart Spirituality", 23.
- <sup>27</sup> Fletcher, "Heart, Spirituality and the Lay Vocation", 3-11.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.